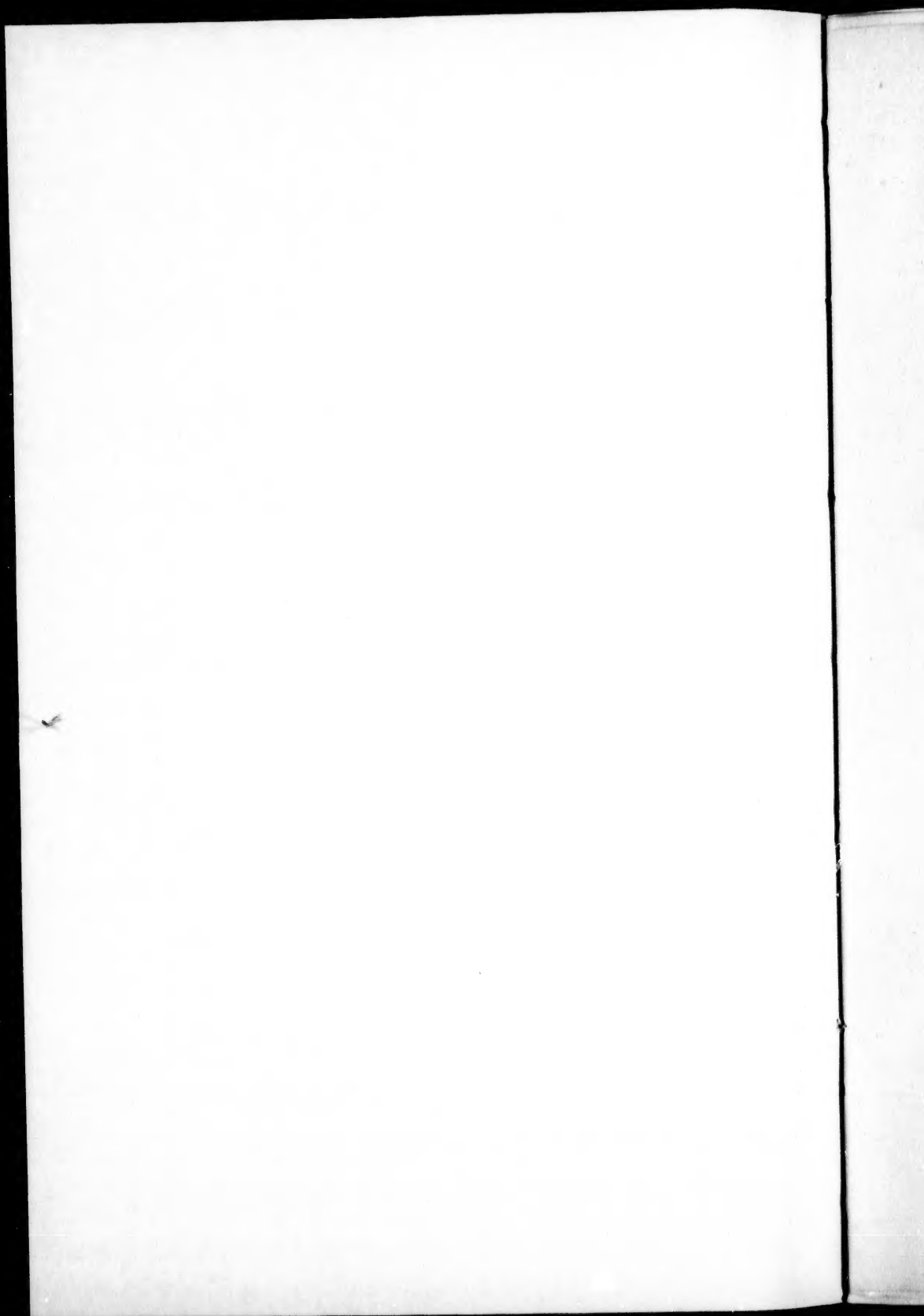




REVIEWS  
OF  
HUBERT H. BANCROFT'S  
HISTORY OF THE PACIFIC STATES  
FROM THE  
BRITISH QUARTERLY REVIEW  
AND THE  
LONDON TIMES.

1884  
(36)

## VOLS. 1 and 2. CENTRAL AMERICA, VOLS. 1 and 2.

(From the LONDON TIMES. Nov. 16, 1883.)

This important and exhaustive work is a monument of diligent research and investigation. This will be apparent when we state that, in the course of his history, Mr Bancroft quotes from upwards of 1,800 authorities, and that these two volumes embrace 1,470 large and closely-printed pages. The subject is a great one, and the record of the Pacific Coast is full of exciting incidents and romantic adventures, which are here told with a fulness that leaves nothing to be desired. A few years ago the author published what may be styled a companion, or introductory work, in "The Native Races of the Pacific States." The latter narrative purported to be a full and careful examination into the character and customs of the aboriginal inhabitants of the western portion of North America at the time they were first seen by their subduers. The new work now before us is a history of the same territory from the coming of the Europeans.

The extensive nature of the plan may be gathered from the fact, that the territory covered embraces the whole of Central America and Mexico, and all Anglo-American domains west of the Rocky Mountains. The first volume deals with a period of only thirty years—viz., from 1501 to 1530. It opens with a very interesting view of European society, and more especially of Spanish civilization at about the close of the 15th century. There is also given a summary of maritime exploration from the 4th century to the year 1540, and this is followed by an account of the great colonizers of the Pacific States. The order of treatment adopted is to proceed geographically from south to north, though in regard to some minor divisions of his work the author has found it convenient to depart from this plan. In regard to all the territorial sub-divisions, southern as well as northern, he treats the beginnings and earliest development more fully than later events; though, after the conquest, the histories of Central America and Mexico are presented on a scale sufficiently comprehensive, but natural rather than local. "The Northern Mexican States, having had a more varied experience, arising from nearer contact with progressional events, receive somewhat more attention in regard to detail than other parts of the Republic. To the Pacific United States is devoted more space, comparatively, than to southern regions, California being regarded as the centre and culminating point of this historical field." There is undoubtedly justice in this view, for the region last indicated is one that is daily assuming greater prominence in the remarkable roll of Western development.

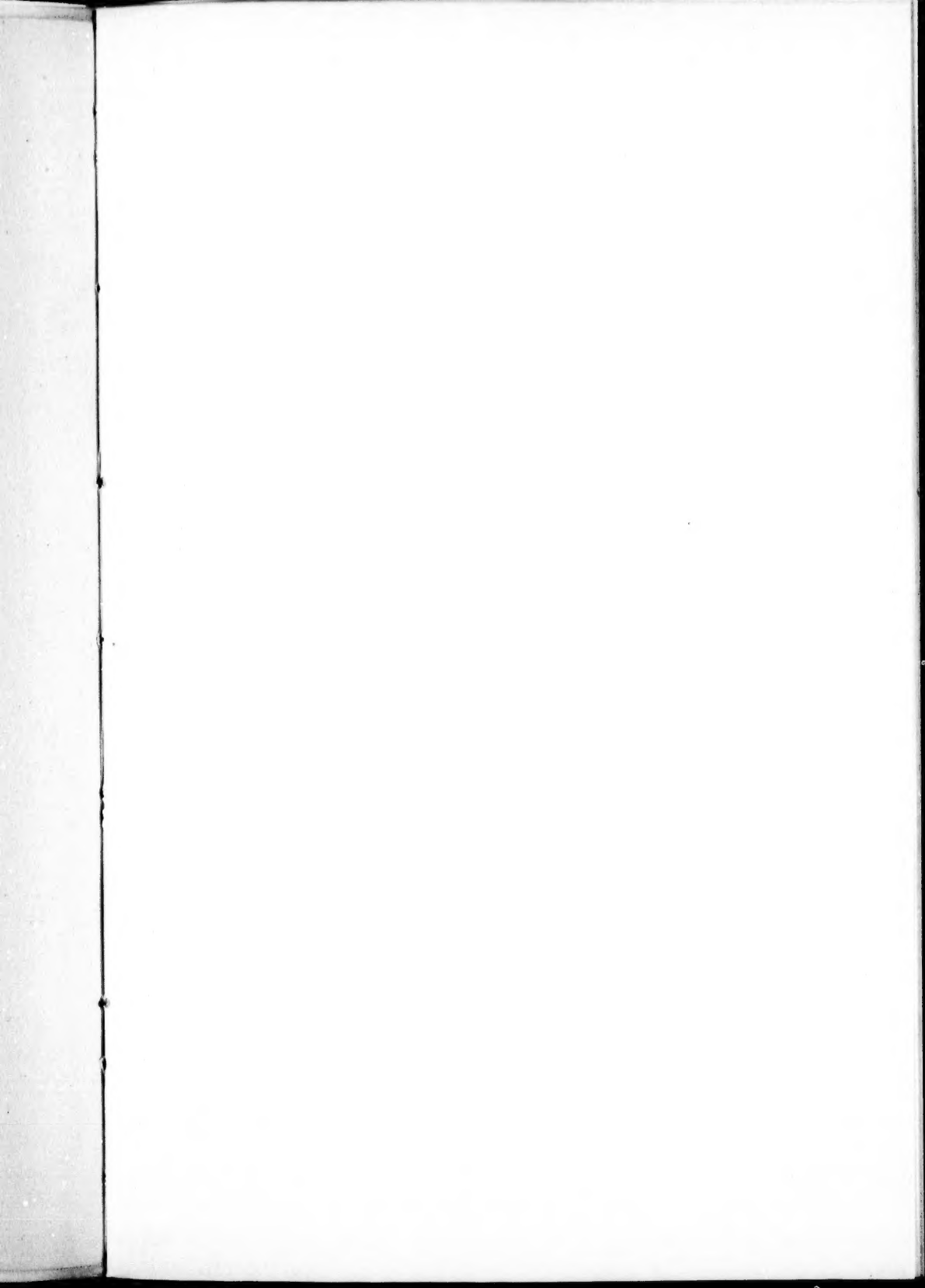
Mr Bancroft ably, and, on the whole, justly indicates the true functions of the historian who essays a work of this magnitude. To an accurate record of events, he gives its due place, this being the foundation of all historical writing; for of what avail is the brilliancy of a Macaulay if the basis of his eloquence be insecure? Yet, of equal importance with events is the institutional development which they cause or accompany. Equal study must be given to men, industries and institutions. "Cause and effect are more essential than mere occurrence; achievements of peace should take precedence of warlike conquest; the condition of the people is a more interesting and profitable subject of investigation than the acts of governors, the valor of generals, or the doctrines of priests. The historian must classify and digest, and teach as well as record; he should not, however, confound his conclusions with the facts upon which they rest." The author appears to have faithfully adhered to the plan he has thus laid down; and, large as the work is, the writing is far from verbose; it is, indeed, condensed in style, and admirable for its vigor and freshness.

Some of the sections of this work have, of course, already received separate treatment at the hands of that late able and conscientious American historian, Mr Prescott, whose "Conquest of Peru" and other works are more attractive than the vast majority of works of fiction. But the labor of Mr Bancroft is not by any means superfluous; it is rather necessary and supplementary, as showing the action of the Pacific States one upon another and what relation the development of one has borne to that of others. We get here, in fact, the history of the States, with all their interests, separate or conjoint. As a good example of Mr Bancroft's style, we may quote this passage, describing the condition of the world 400 years ago, when civilization began to make its way towards the West:

"It was a transition period from the dim twilight of the dark age to the brightness of modern thought; from an age of unquestioning faith to one of curiosity and scepticism. It was a period of concretions and crystalizations, following one of many rarefactions; religion was embracing science; astrology was merging into astronomy; magic into physics; alchemy into chemistry; saltpetre was superceding steel in warfare; feudalism having fulfilled its purpose, was being displaced by monarchical power; intercourse was springing up between nations, and international laws were being made. Even the material universe and the realms of space were enlarging with the enlargement of mind. Two worlds were about that time unveiled to Spain, an oriental and an occidental; by the capture of Constantinople, ancient Greek and Latin learning was emancipated, and the Christian religion became settled as the faith of Europe; while towards the west, the mists of the ages lifted from the ocean, and, as if emerging from primeval waters, a fair, new continent, ripe for a thousand industries, stood revealed."

The work of Columbus occupies a special chapter, and this is succeeded by the discovery of Darien, the administration of the Indies, the discovery of the Pacific Ocean, the wars of the Spaniards, the colonization of Honduras, the conquest of Guatemala, and other matters, the career of the pioneer warriors being traced with much fulness. In the second volume, the author deals with Pizarro and Peru, the marvelous story being told again with great freshness—Castilla del Oro, the Indian revolts in Guatemala, Alvarado's expedition to Peru, affairs in Honduras and Nicaragua, the conquest of Chiapas, Panama and Peru, Drake and Oxenham's expedition, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, the Buccaneers, etc. In short, in these pages is traced the history of Spanish Conquest and colonization in Central America, from the time when Rodrigo de Bastidas first touched Tierra Firme to the close of the 18th century. "We have seen the sword and the cross side by side, without a shadow of right or recompense, enter and take possession of the broad area from Darien to New Spain; then sitting down to wrangle and to rest." Some measure of cruelty and wrong is inseparable from the colonization of new States; but, as Mr Bancroft points out, the American Indians were, for the most part, docile, and submitted with philosophic resignation to the inevitable, which was too often infamous on the part of civilization and Christianity.

In a third and concluding volume, the author proposes to discuss at length the social, industrial and political condition of the country in the 19th century, particularly at the transitional epoch following the achievement of independence from Spain, and immediately afterwards. "Spain," as he observes, "is about to reap the reward of nearly three centuries of misrule. Through her indifference, the commerce of the western hemisphere had long since fallen into the hands of foreigners; and her colonies no longer desired to maintain their connection with the mother country, from which they had nothing to gain, and with whose interests they had little in common." With the issue of the third volume of this work, by no means the least important, Mr Bancroft's history will become, and undoubtedly remain, the standard authority upon the Pacific States. In the completion of his formidable task, we wish him all success.





## VOLS. 4 and 5. MEXICO. VOLS. 1 and 2.

[From the BRITISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, October, 1883.]

These two volumes, which are devoted to a History of the Conquest of Mexico, are in many ways remarkable. Mr Bancroft, by this masterly work, justifies all the hopes that his "History of the Native Races of America" excited. He shows not only learning and research, and rare literary power—grace and charm of style, without extravagance or rhetoric—but quick sympathy, together with great independence and impartiality of judgment. He follows no former historian, and doubtless will lay himself open to attack by the freedom with which he handles former authorities. Neither Robertson nor Prescott escapes, and he speaks rather coldly of Sir Arthur Helps's histories as well-meant and thoughtful, but imaginative—theories of the man standing too much in place of research and exact knowledge. Learning lays no weight on Mr Bancroft's narrative; this proceeds as lightly as though his course had not been impeded by the difficulties inseparable from original research. His authorities occupy over a hundred pages of small type. His treasury of manuscripts seems to be unique and extensive. If he is a little over-cynical now and then, this may well be pardoned to a man who has had to wade so far into the stagnant deeps of human nature. He might, however, have qualified and allowed for exceptions sometimes, as when he writes like this: "As for honor, integrity, and all those virtues which go to make a man, we must not expect them in princes or in politicians." The chief merit of these two volumes is the combination in them of exactitude and exhaustive knowledge with sympathy and humane comprehension. The magnificence of the conception which contemplated the conquest of half a continent, and the daring enterprise and bravery with which it was achieved, do not blind him to the defects of the actors. No historian has more faithfully painted his heroes, both in light and in shade, than Mr Bancroft has painted Hernando Cortés in these pages. He lives before us as we read—the very man in form and pressure. While Mr Bancroft deprecates the lack of moral elevation in Cortés, and never fails to enforce the fact, his records, nevertheless, contain a due sense of the magnificence and daring of his exploits. And this all the more that those who were associated with Cortés, while as powerful in character as he, show far nobler traits and possibilities. Mr Bancroft brings forward the lieutenants, and paints them in their own features and independent personality. In this he shows the rarest power; for he preserves relations, and makes the more marked traits in the one emphasize and relieve the contrasted traits in the other. The portraits of Don Gonzalo di Sandoval, Leon, and Aguilar are simply masterly. A few strokes, and the character is fully revealed; and we understand how the man will act. The sketches of Montezuma and of the more distinguished Aztecs are also vivid, and exhibit such comprehensiveness of character and purpose as few historians have surpassed. The tragedy deepens as it proceeds—the duplicity, the greed, the unscrupulousness, the cruelty are all undisguisedly set forth, and with such effect as makes us ashamed of our boasted European civilization. The characters of the Mexicans, in essential points—their sensitiveness, their honor, their desire to sacrifice so much to be at peace—are honestly set forth. In spite of a cruel, debasing religion, they showed fine traits. Something of their submissive-



ness was no doubt due to their remarkable presentiment of a coming white man who should subdue them; but it is evident that they were in some things superior to the Spaniards, who carried corruption with them. The well-known story of diplomacy and craft and bloodshed has never been told with more comprehensive grasp of detail, or a more simple, vigorous, and massive style. Mr Bancroft, if he has not said the final word about the conquest of Mexico, has rendered further research almost a work of supererogation. In nothing is he more instructive than in his constant and careful tracing out of the work of the Church as it followed in the wake of the work of conquest. Let these two passages stand side by side—"Ah, it was pitiful life to the Aztecs now, this world a great charnel-house, filled with the bones of their loved ones, and their hearts dead, though still bleeding. What were their sins more than others' that they should be so stricken, that they should be so ground to the dust, while the conquerors, flushed with victory, were exulting before God because He had so ordered and accomplished? They had sacrificed human beings on the altars of their gods—sixty thousand in one year, some said. But what were these butcheries of the Spaniards but human sacrifices of more than six times sixty thousand in one generation? Behold them as they file along the causeway, the very sun striking black and stifling on their famine-stricken forms and agonized faces. On them, then, ye conquerors, complete your work; for in its swift continuance is their earlier rest!" And this—"And all along through the century we have seen explorers and conquerors, city-builders and miners, side by side with self-denying and exemplary friars, who, while replacing a cruel and debasing worship with a gentler faith, sought to ameliorate the condition of their charge, ever mysteriously fading into the immaterial before their pitying eyes. Meanwhile able men appear at the head of ecclesiastical affairs, and the Church rises into power, gaining for the millions lost in the Old World millions in the New."

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VOLS. 2 and 6. CENTRAL AMERICA, VOL. 2. MEXICO, VOL. 3.

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[FROM THE BRITISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, JANUARY, 1884.]

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Mr Hubert Bancroft proceeds successfully in his gigantic enterprise. He now presents us with two more bulky volumes, pack-full of facts, solidly earnest, if not always eloquent in style; and giving on every page the proof not only of exhaustive study of documents, but of knowledge of human nature, power of penetrating motives, and capacity to paint individual portraits with decision, and with that comprehensiveness of spirit which is so essential to the historian in enabling him to subordinate biography to history. Macaulay and Carlyle both tend to transform history into a series of biographies, and Sir Arthur Helps to a great extent failed as an historian from his desire to find a preconceived idea fulfilled in certain typical men. American writers like Prescott and Bancroft have, on the whole, been more successful as historians, if less gifted as artists and thinkers; and Mr Hubert Bancroft is, in several respects, a worthy successor to them. In addition to the voluminous authorities which he cited in the beginning of his first volume, he gives a supplemental list to each of these volumes embracing whole libraries; and his chapter of Appendix to his Second Volume, summarizing so neatly the "Bibliography of Voyage Collections," is an excellent example of a kind of work which only a true historian could do, but which too often the historians neglect for more showy and eloquent composition.

These two volumes more and more attest Mr Hubert Bancroft's power as a master in narrative. The salient incidents seem to repeat themselves with something like fatalistic iteration. The passion for gold grew with what it fed on; and the same expedients, with but slight variations of accessories, constantly suggested themselves. But Mr Bancroft, by dint of his gift for seizing individual traits, manages to infuse freshness and some measure of dramatic interest into each of his grand pictures; it is only the scenes and the stage furniture which remain the same—the characters change. Hernando Pizarro repeated exactly the earlier experiences in his contact with Atahualpa in Peru, and the animal passions mixed themselves up with the love of lucre as aforetime. We read, for example, "The people were now hiding the gold; the Spaniards desired the death of Atahualpa, with the liberty to devastate and pillage after the old manner. They determined that the Inca should die; but first they would melt down and divide the gold; they determined to kill the Inca, but first he should have a fair trial. It was no difficult matter to frame an indictment. Huascar's death, pretended insurrections, delay in the ransom, refusal to accept baptism—these charges, or any of them, were amply sufficient. Then Felipillo desired one of Atahualpa's wives, and did what he could to hasten his death." What a commentary on Mr Carlyle's doctrine of "Might is Right" does the whole history afford—a kind of grim panorama in which the fable of the wolf and the lamb, with men for characters, is successively illustrated. We really do not know whether a certain sense of relief is not felt by way of a vindication of a broad moral order in the universe when we read, "After this in the history of Peru comes the feud between the associate conquerors; for here, as elsewhere, no sooner are the savages slain than their destroyers fall to fighting among themselves. Almagro and Pizarro are old men, old friends, co-partners; yet instead of dividing their immense acquisition and devoting the brief remainder of their days to peaceful pursuits, so deadly become their hatred that each seemed unable to rest while the other lived." The empire of the Incas fell to pieces; and the Spaniards seized the opportunity, which they failed to turn to full account, though they enriched themselves. It is because of the clearness with which these unexpected and dramatic turnings of Time's wheel, which so decisively brings its own revenge, are held in view and presented, together with an elevated moral tone and determination to exaggerate nothing, that we can say of Mr Bancroft's volumes that they are touched with dramatic penetration and genius. The portrait which we have here of Las Casas is in every respect faithful and incisive; it is a portrait which ought to endure; and as a contrast to it might be cited the section in the next chapter which recounts the rise and the death-doom of Dona Beatriz in Guatemala. The style in which Mr Bancroft treats the outrages which the buccaneers and Scotch settlers in their turn inflicted on the Spaniards as times went on, might be advanced as proof of his impartiality and judicial tone. The chapter, of the present volume on Mexico, detailing the events that led to the overthrow of Gelves, and the peculiar compressed energy of the chapter headed "Flood, Famine, and Eclipse," we regard as striking examples of lofty and animated eloquence. We have been compelled to confine ourselves to merely general characterization, because points for remarks or for description present themselves in every chapter, and an article, or articles, would be wanted for their full treatment.

## VOL. 10. NORTH MEXICAN STATES and TEXAS, VOL. 1.

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[From the BRITISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, April, 1884.]

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This new volume of Mr Bancroft's work sufficiently justifies all that we have said of former volumes. If it lacks the brilliancy of episode which characterized the two volumes we last noticed, it maintains a high level of vigorous narrative. The weight and multiplicity of the facts do not embarrass him; the largeness of the field does not confuse his vision. The broad stream of events is kept faithfully in view, but the master-leaders are not allowed to be absorbed in it. The study we have here of Cortés, in the new efforts he put forth in the direction of explorations in the north, is at once careful and eloquent. The peculiar elements which the Jesuit influence contributed to the problem of conquest in Mexico, especially in the north, is traced out with decision and clearness, and yet with largeness of outline. Not a few readers will turn with especial interest to the account we have here of earlier European adventure in California, and we should suppose will be a little surprised to know how soon the Jesuits asserted themselves there, and with effect. The portraits of Salvatierra and Lorenzo are in every respect vigorous, and, so far as we can judge, faithful. The sketches of St. Francis Xavier and Father Kino impart in their own way a softening element to the story of calculation and ambition and strife. The minute way in which the labors of the Mission Fathers to convert the Indians is followed up, shows the very mixed nature of the motives which marked such enterprises in those days. The quarrels between the Jesuits and the Spanish settlers could not be passed over, and the facts connected with them are faithfully chronicled. It is impossible for us to do more in the space at our disposal here than to briefly and generally characterize a volume which, like its predecessors, is at once a monument of industry and of literary skill. The special authorities for this volume fill some forty closely printed pages, so that the immense labor that has gone to produce it may be guessed.

